



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

GRAO EN LINGUA E LITERATURA INGLESAS

CURSO 2018-2019

Xullo 2019

Greenspeaking English and endangered languages. An ecological perspective.

Iria Sánchez Pita

Titora: Teresa Moure



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A handwritten signature in black ink, slanted upwards to the right. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Iria Sánchez Pita'.

Autora: Iria Sánchez Pita

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SOLICITO a aprobación do seguinte título e resumo:

Título: Greenspeaking English and endangered languages. An ecological perspective.

Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

Ecolinguistics is a discipline that was born in order to wide the field of Sociolinguistics with the idea of understanding not only the use of language in social context, but also its effects on the ecological context. The study has its basis on the principles of Ecolinguistics which, as mentioned, is a discipline that studies how languages influence both our relationship with the environment and our fellow speakers. The perspective will be a research on the tradition of the ecology of languages by a comparison between the world view in English and several languages around the world, with the particularity of being endangered or even extinct. The aim is to focus on indigenous languages, these not being technologized so that the different implications regarding social and environmental issues are evidenced.

By taking English as the center of the study, the idea is to understand its grammar, with emphasis on both morphology and syntax, and its effects on our relations with the human and natural ecosystem around us. Being English the international language of the XXI century, the conclusions taken from its analysis will help us to understand the perspective of the Western world, represented by the vehicular implications of the English language. The contrast with the information suggested by the study of different examples of endangered languages will allow the project to define itself as a research on comparative linguistics, with the intention of reaching a deeper understanding of the direct implications of the human language in context.

The project will be organized as follows: an introduction in which the theoretical framework of Ecolinguistics will be explained, a consideration of the relevance of English as the vehicular language of the modern Western world, an overview of the grammatical elements of the English language in contrast with examples from other languages around the world, and the conclusions taken from the study.

SRA. DECANA DA FACULDADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidenta da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)

Santiago de Compostela, 05 de Noviembre de 2018.

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SRA. DECANA DA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidenta da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)

1. INTRODUCTION

In my view, one of the most striking things during these four years studying English and linguistics was the fact that before entering college, I had never been concerned with such a thing as language studies. This is why I began to be interested about what the repercussions of linguistics in the real world were; before entering college I was familiar with Darwin's theory of evolution or with Einstein's theory of relativity. I knew the capitals of the world and I more or less understood what happens when someone suffers from a heart attack. However, I never asked myself how many languages there were in the world, or what the word *language* really meant. After realizing that, I decided that what I wanted to do was to show to the people that surrounded me that language was not only something they used to communicate with their peers, but a very interesting phenomenon that has the potential to change the way we understand the world and, most importantly, that linguistic knowledge was something that should be shared with the general public as it has the ability to suggest solutions to many problems that affect us humans every day in the same way that medicine or physics do. That is the reason why I choose this topic for my project, and it all begins with the idea that languages determine our understanding of the world.

Since the formulation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the field of linguistics has assumed (at a higher or lower level) that languages are means to produce realities. Taking this perspective as the basis of the epistemological frame of this project, I will try to prove that, by comparing English with a number of endangered languages, we can find in their lexicon and grammar certain mechanisms that conditioned the relation of the speakers of those languages with the environment. Thus, throughout these pages, it will be shown how the proper

knowledge of those linguistic mechanisms would be a key issue for us as a global community to incorporate in our collective fight against the ecological crisis we are facing in the twenty-first century globalized world.

During the last century, the world has suffered from very radical changes that have constituted it as we see it today. The two World Wars, the rise of modern capitalism and the technological revolution were crucial actors in the development of the modern western identity, which was marked by the newest ideals of globalization. After that, the western discourse proposed that the supposedly modern *technologized* world was the perfect context for the free growth that the economic system was based on. The globalizing discourse exported the ideals of the *American Dream* to the web of ‘developed countries’ that were trying to engage in the new liberalist economies, cultivating in the population’s collective mind the idea that productivity was the ideal and most democratic criterion for success. Early on, success was understood in terms of consumerism: the more one could afford -and buy-, the better one’s position was within the global society, and thus more power owed over one’s peers.

However, the world was -and still is- way larger than what the western society was aiming to portray in its ideological tale, and most humans were not represented in the “universal” principles that were constituting the modern world. The imbalances of power that were taking place among the European and North American communities were incomparable to the injustices that these communities were executing in “third world countries” in order to fulfill the requirements of the consumerist life in the West. Coming from the Imperialist era of Europe, the exploitation of resources in America, Asia and Africa increased with the new

industrial revolution of the twentieth century, and the mistreating of both lands and human beings in those exploited places became the price to pay for the promised progress.

The twenty-first century arrived with the call to senses of a group of professionals in several areas that assured that this way of living, which was the promise of a better life to the people on western countries was destroying the planet. The global alarm of an imminent ecological collapse was -and still is- denied against scientific fact, but the Academies go on publishing articles that highlight the importance of awareness of the ecosystem we live in; and, of course, linguistics is one of the several disciplines that are proposing short and long term solutions to this problem. And that is where this text comes from: as linguistics is a discipline that studies language in order to find new, true and non-trivial knowledge (what we call theoretical linguistics) in order to apply it to solve real problems in the real world (that is, applied linguistics), the discipline needs to reconsider itself from a more ecologically-friendly perspective. That is what *ecolinguistics* aimed to do when it proposed the discipline of human language studies to reconsider the point of view from which it was approaching its object of study so that it could fulfill the true necessities of both the discipline itself and the world in which it was being developed. Thus, that way of doing linguistics would not rely anymore in working from the personal offices of a bunch of experts in language and it would reach the world.

To fulfill the requirements of a project that follows the lesson of ecolinguistics, I will base my study on the comparison of the English language to several other languages; in that comparison, what will be searched for are the different ways of understanding the world that are linguistically based. Thus, in the first chapter I will develop both the theoretical framework I took for this project (being essentially based on the linguistic relativity

hypothesis) and the context in which that theoretical framework together with the perspective of ecolinguistics operates. In chapter number three, I will proceed to the main study of this text, firstly developing the notion of linguistic diversity in order to understand the importance of comparative linguistics; then, I will divide the study into grammar -where some of the most salient characteristics of the English morphosyntax will be explained- and lexicon, and I will provide several examples of other languages that evidence a different worldview from that of the English language. To do so, I will follow the literature on these issues and, in particular, specific examples of both English -as the center of this project- and the rest of the languages that will be explored.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXT

Language is an essential part of human existence. When we define it as the most effective means of communication among our species, we are properly describing -and understanding- the relevance that articulated language has in our lives. Language serves as a very interesting vehicle to transmit information, but it also regulates how we perceive the world around us and it conditions our behavior. It also serves as a tool for art, science or any other human activity. We could go on listing the several functions that our language fulfills, but that is not the purpose of this text. On the contrary, throughout this pages we will focus on how languages determine our way of understanding and behaving in the world in order to illustrate how the mechanisms of languages could help us to face the ecological crisis of the twenty-first century. However, some aspects of the paradigm that will be explored in this project require further explanation in order to develop the context of a study such as this one.

2.1. The perspective of Ecolinguistics

The second half of the twentieth century was a pivotal moment for the discipline that studies human language. The revolution in the field owes a lot to several authors, and every student of linguistics would recognize many names that are frequently mentioned in any linguistics class. One of the most famous is William Labov, who in 1972 published *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, a text in which he proposed a new approach for the study of language, focusing on the context of the production of verbal emissions. Since then, Labov has been considered one of the fathers of *sociolinguistics*, but there are other names that contributed to the

development of new perspectives in the discipline but are less popular. That is the case of Michael Krauss; after a deep reflection on the issue of the disappearance of languages, this scholar estimated that before the end of the twenty-first century, 50% of the languages on earth would disappear (Michael Krauss, 1992:6). As a moment of development of the discipline, the twentieth century contributed to the birth of new branches that would approach the study of language from transversal perspectives, and would also actively include the knowledge of fields such as sociology or anthropology.

One of the branches of linguistics that emerged in that context of change was *ecolinguistics*, key in this project. The roots of ecolinguistics, according to Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001:1), can be traced back to the decade of the 1970s; they pointed to Einar Haugen as the father of this new approach, as he introduced the idea of *the ecology of language*. Haugen (in Fill and Mühlhäusler, 2001:57) himself defines *language ecology* “as the study of interactions between any given language and its environment”. Haugen widens his explanation to specify what *environment* means in his definition, implying that the environment of a language exists within the collective minds of its speakers. The repercussions of this statement are highly relevant, as Haugen (in Fill and Mühlhäusler, 2001:57) affirms that language “only functions in relating [its] users to one another and to nature”. From this moment onwards, our understanding of the connections between language and ecology would change forever.

According to Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001), this idea of the ecology of language widened and entered transversally in all the divisions of the discipline, and all those practices evolved to become what we call today *ecolinguistics*. Moreover, as it has happened in the last decades in several fields of knowledge that have embraced an ecological perspective, the necessary

development of a branch of linguistics such as ecolinguistics was triggered by a new epistemological framework that was highly critical of the approach linguistics took to the study of language. Stibbe in Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001:406) said:

The need for an ecolinguistics arises only to supplement a discipline, linguistics, which rarely acknowledges the ecological embedding of the animal it investigates, treating humans as existing in isolation rather than in relationship with the rest of the biosphere and the diversity of lifeforms within it.

So, in the context of a world concerned with the environmental changes that the scientific community was describing, the whole of human knowledge started to develop new theoretical frames that focussed on facing the ecological problems. Harré et al (1995:1) declared that it is in this particular context when “ecological and environmental studies need to take a linguistic turn”, and so it happened; the branch of ecolinguistics was born with the aim to study how language affects our relations with the environment and our fellow humans.

But writing on the ecology of language adopted several points of departure in order to justify its epistemology. Mühlhäusler in Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001:32) explained how, as language change cannot parallel societal and technological changes, our languages -those of ‘advanced’ communities, represented globally by English- did not cover the necessities of representing the current world, marked by the need for an ecological view that might help to solve the environmental issues that the twenty-first century world is facing. Mühlhäusler in Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001:32) follows up his reasoning by explaining that “[t]he capacity of human beings to drastically change their environment was extremely limited before the industrial revolution”, but the options that human communities have nowadays to dramatically change our ecosystems are growing exponentially. This is one of the reasons why

the study of human language requires a fast shift to an environmentally-friendly point of departure. The author then proposes two aspects that he considers to be key from a linguistic point of view when discussing environmental issues: on the one hand, “the growing number of observations about the inadequacy of natural language to deal with the problems at hand”, and, on the other hand, “the development of ad hoc linguistic solutions by a large number of agencies [...]” [Mühlhäusler in Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001:32)].

Mühlhäusler’s formulation helps us to introduce the concept of *greenspeak*, which the author -in collaboration with many others- developed in order to propose solutions for the problems they diagnosed. By reading Harré et al (1995) we can define the notion of greenspeak as the strategies the professionals on human language can apply to any given language so that it responds to a predefined philosophy -regarding, of course, environmental issues-; in other words, greenspeak refers to an *environmental discourse*. Harré et al (1995) center the focus of greenspeak on lexicon as it is the most effective dimension of language when examining speakers adopting new perspectives. This means that the vocabulary of a language is very deeply connected to its speakers, as it is highly connected to cultural practices and ideological worldviews. It helps to represent the changes in the world of particular communities and is the component of language that changes the fastest. However, throughout this project, we will also focus on strategies that could ‘greenspeak’ English at the structural level of the language; in this sense, two paths -that of the grammar and that of the lexicon- will be taken to understand what the English language says about the relation of its speakers with their environment.

The way ecolinguistics operates may seem confusing at first. Previously, we mentioned that it is a branch of linguistics that studies how languages affect our interactions with the

environment and other fellow humans. However, ecolinguistics can be also understood as a perspective that might be widened to all aspects of the study of human language. Fill in Fill and Muhlhausler (2001:51) proposes:

Ecolinguistics [...] involves theoretical, methodological and empirical studies of language and offers new perspectives on all these levels for linguists interested in ecology. It can truly be claimed that here is a field of study worth being considered by linguistic talent in search of a challenging task.

Besides its own interests as a branch of linguistics, the approaches of ecolinguistics can - and should- be treated as a transversal perspective that might be present in all the branches of the discipline. Basically, the ecology of language aims to put the object of study of linguistics -human language- in its place: human language is essentially part of our biological and social nature, but, as human beings, language transcends the very nature of our species as we belong to a wider system. Stibbe (2015:4) pointed out that we have taken human beings as elements of nature that are beyond nature, and that we define ourselves by describing what differentiates us from the rest of the animal kingdom. This idea goes against one consideration underlying in several approaches: that human language constitutes the essence of humanity, and thus it is what makes us unique. Stibbe (2015:4) is very critical of that idea, and claimed that

[t]he danger in focussing on difference is that the story can obscure some of the important things that humans and other animals have in common: having emotions, being embodied, bonding socially with others, and most importantly, being dependent on other species and the environment for our continued survival.

This means that what we should extract from ecolinguistics is the *point of view*. This is essential to understand the necessity of developing new theoretical and applied frameworks that are able to produce knowledge and solve problems, but that do not go against the

ecological requirements of our planet. What is essential to approach the study of language from an ecological perspective is, in fact, to adopt what Stibbe (2015) calls *ecosophy*, which can be described as the perspective from which we look at our field of study. It is important to mention that designing a personal ethical framework in the search of new, non-trivial knowledge is not something that should be seen as negative. In fact, although we might try to be as neutral as possible while researching, this has always been a very important debate in the philosophy of science. Authors such as Thomas Kuhn (1970) have commented on how the context of a researcher influences the investigation and vice versa. In this sense, it is our conception of the world what allows us to make science, and scientific advancements make us view the world differently. Thus, it is obvious that twenty-first century humans' awareness of the ecological crisis of the moment will lead to scientific practices that bear in mind an ecological perspective.

Everything that has been covered in this chapter describes the birth and purpose of ecolinguistics. But, as it has been mentioned before, this project is based on one of the many functions of human language: creating and *mediating* reality. This proposal is not new in the discipline, but since the birth of ecolinguistics, it takes on new relevance. In the following section we will contextualize that hypothesis -the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis-, to connect it with the process of greenspeaking English.

2. 2. *The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis*

Though not new, the *linguistic relativity hypothesis* also experienced a moment of intense development in the twentieth century. According to Lucy (1997:293-294), it happened due to the works “of anthropological linguists Edward Sapir [...] and Benjamin L. Whorf [...]

(hence the common designation of the linguistic relativity hypothesis as "the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis")". The works of these two authors revolutionized the ideas on the connections between language and reality; Lucy (1997:294) explains that this relationship is based on the idea that "[l]anguage embodies *an interpretation* of reality and language can *influence* thought about that reality".

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis thus can be explained, according to Mounin (1972:96-97) as a not-so-new idea about language that suggests that "any language shows an specific analysis of the external world, that imposes on the speaker a particular way of seeing and interpreting the world"¹. To describe it in the terms that a ecolinguistic reading demands, and following the logics of the linguistic relativity hypothesis, Harré et al (1995:19) stated that our discourse locates us in a specific environment and, furthermore, teaches us how to interact with it.

Of course this hypothesis has not always been the most accepted. In the 1960s, it lost popularity among language specialists, "due to a prevalent influence of Chomsky's ideas emphasizing language and cognition to be separate abilities of the mind" (Perlovsky, 2009:518). However, in the recent years and thanks to the ever more interdisciplinary nature of language studies, the interest in this perspective has increased. Perlovsky (2009:518) explains how the interactions that happen between language and cognition have been proven by brain observation techniques, and that some of these experiments showed how "learning a word 'rewires' cognitive circuits in the brain [and] learning a color name moves perception from right to left hemisphere". The fact that the brain is physiologically affected by language will influence our cognition, our way of thinking; yet, Perlovsky (2009) goes beyond that

¹ T. By the Author. The quotations that were not originally written in English can be found in the Appendix section.

dimension and assures that those effects have been proven to also affect our emotional response. For example, “Spanish–English bilinguals manifested more intense emotions in psychological interviews conducted in Spanish than in English, irrespective of whether their first language was English or Spanish” (Perlovsky, 2009:518-519).

The theory and the evidence that has been produced on this issue guide us to incorporate it in the perspective of ecolinguistics and, more concretely, in the attempts to greenspeak the European languages. This is obvious for the specialists on ecolinguistics; authors such as Harré et al (1995:20) stated that

the cultural-historical change of the meaning of natural process and human history, which is so essential for environmental discourse, cannot be understood detached from developments of their semiotic systems that are particular cultural systems themselves. They not only carry and present but also create these meanings, bringing new realities into view.

Stibbe (2015) names this way of thinking that has been shaped by language “the stories we live by”, and defines it as “mental models that influence behavior and lie at the heart of the ecological challenges we are facing”. The perspective that connects the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis with the interests of the branch of ecolinguistics proposes that language influences our worldview and determines the way we think. Thus, language will be the center of all our interactions with both the environment and our communities. The justification of studying languages from an ecological perspective bearing in mind the linguistic relativity hypothesis is very interestingly defined by Stibbe (2015:1):

How we think has an influence on how we act, so language can inspire us to destroy or protect the ecosystems that life depends on. Ecolinguistics, then, is about critiquing forms of language that contribute to ecological destruction, and aiding the search for new forms of language that inspire people to protect the natural world.

As languages are such an essential part of our lives and have the ability to modify our thinking, it is easy to understand how, if it were done, greenspeaking them would dramatically change our relationship with the environment; besides, it would also teach us that the fight against the ecological crisis requires efforts that transcend the mere actions of *reducing plastics* or *singing to cows* in milk factories. This example comes from 2018, when Spanish company Central Lechera Asturiana launched an advertisement in which farm workers were singing to cows with the aim to show how the cows that produced the milk they sold were well-treated (implying that they were a cruelty-free company). It was a very controversial message, as the discourse was perceived as misleading among the ecological-aware community. Singing to cows as a proof of cruelty-free production is a shallow discourse that hides the fact that the mass production of animal products cannot be ecologically-friendly whatsoever.

Although the reason to take the perspective of the linguistic relativity hypothesis as the theoretical framework has been already explained, we must clarify that “[e]ffective comparative investigation of the linguistic relativity hypothesis requires direct linguistic, ethnographic, and psychological research in two or more cultures” (Lucy, 1996:7). That is the reason why this study will focus on the study of the English language in comparison to several other languages. This will help us to properly understand the relevance of different aspects of the worldview of the English language thanks to the effectiveness of comparative linguistics; thus, the process of greenspeaking the English language will be more successful.

Up until now we have covered the state of linguistics and ecolinguistics and the theoretical framework taken for this text. However, the objective of this project is to compare

the English language -as the vehicular language of the western world- to some endangered or extinct languages of *non-technologized* communities. When we formulate such a proposal, we must take into account that linguistics is a discipline that operates in a particular context. This means that, if we want to greenspeak the English language, we need to analyze the context in which that process of analysis will take place. That context is the twenty-first century world, with its own characteristics that affect the point of view of the project. In the following section, those aspects will be explained in order to fully contextualize our analysis.

2. 3. *The Western Identity*

In the previous sections we have talked about the perspective that ecolinguistics proposes to study human language, and the paradigm which serves as the basis for this text. As we endeavor to study how the English grammar affects the relationship between the speakers and their environment -and, of course, the rest of the human species-, it will be necessary to analyze the worldview that the English language -as an abstract and ample entity- has developed.

We defined English as the vehicular language of western societies. Thus, there must be something in common among the collective mind of the different communities that constitute the western world. All those issues will be covered throughout this section, with a particular emphasis on the notion of *identity*, and, more specifically, *collective identity* which, according to Wendt (1994:387) is related to the notion of *nationalism*, and follows a process of identification through *domestic factors*, such as language, ethnic relation and culture. In this sense, the collective identity can be succinctly defined as the common aspects of the inner selves of a particular group regarding its own context.

As it is a complex task to define a construct such as the western identity, there are several questions that we must answer beforehand. First of all, what can we call a *western individual*? Can we reduce the diversity of the peoples in the western world to one unified identity? And if it exists, when was the western identity born?

First of all, the western individual is ‘easily’ defined as any person who belongs to a western community; people who either were born or grew up in the context of the web of ‘developed’ countries that constitute what has been called ‘the first world’. Although that explanation is remarkably ambiguous and would include hundreds of different peoples -and, of course, would invite a debate on which countries can be included within that label-, we could argue that those millions of people share as many things as necessary to consider them as a wide group. For example, most of the people that live in the western world speak an Indo-European language. Though the particular languages that we speak in western countries are nowadays very different in many ways from what proto Indo-European language might have been, the truth is that it applies another important factor that connects western people: history.

As we all know, the evolution of all the languages that come from Indo-European has paralleled the evolution of their speakers. This does not only apply to the languages that originated in the European continent, but it is very interesting to learn how that evolution connected the different peoples that lived in the pre-Europe territories. Taking English as an example -as it constitutes the main focus of this study-, many authors have described it as a language that, at several points in its history, suffered from a process of *creolization*, meaning that the influence of a language on the system of English was so important as to drastically

change the very system. Bernárdez (2004:146) proposes that, in the Old English period, during the coexistence of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian peoples in the territories of current-day Great Britain, the language that was being spoken in the British isles was the result of the combination between Old Norse and Old English; though both languages were highly similar, many differentiated characteristics from Old Norse were introduced into English, causing what many have called a process of creolization of the language. Notwithstanding that, as English was not a *pidgin* before, the author refuses to use the term *creole* for the subsequent language that was formed throughout history. To add more detail into this idea, we could argue that English went through a very similar process of creolization after the Norman conquest, leading to a renewed English language that blended characteristics from the Germanic and Romanic branches of languages. Of course, not every expert on the English language agrees with this thesis; Gramley (2012:90) suggests that what happened after the Norman conquest was more a process of *relexification* rather than creolization, as, as Gramley (2012:89) said, “we cannot overlook the disproportion between massive French influence on vocabulary, little and none on morphology and syntax, and only trivial influence on phonology”. However, these different perspectives should not obscure the reality of the enormous changes that the English language has gone through during the last ten centuries, and, although this is not an issue of discussion for this project, we could close it by saying that this could be a debate on terminology and not on the process itself, as Danchev (1997:80) suggests. In fact, to conclude this issue, Danchev (1997:81) pointed at something that is really relevant for the description of the western identity:

The exotic connotations of the terms creolization and creole have probably contributed to the generally sceptical attitude of the English historical linguistics community to the M[iddle] E[nglish] creolization hypothesis. In all likelihood this also **reflects the underlying conviction that European languages with a long written tradition and history behind them ought not to be described as creoles.** [Emphasis added]

The explanation above should serve us to illustrate how the history of the cultural development of European communities has been marked by the influence between different groups. The fact that those connections between European communities in the last centuries are so closely related to language itself is relevant enough to begin a thesis about the collective identity of western peoples. However, we mentioned that history will play a very important part in the development of the modern western identity, and so it will be explained in the following paragraphs.

2. 3. 1. Empires, *progress* and power: *Linguistic Imperialism* and the international projection of the English language

To understand the current world and how languages are distributed, there is a moment in the external history of European languages that cannot be avoided in this project: in the fifteenth century, according to the legend, three ships arrived on the American continent in search of an alternative route to India. Since that moment onwards, the age of the European empires begun, and, as we now know, that process has continued until modern times. That expansion of European empires is the reason why nowadays European languages are spoken in the totality of continents of the planet, a phenomenon that, according to Crosby (1986:2-3) is unique for the pre-European communities. The exploitation of the ‘newly discovered’ lands established a hierarchy among the different territories of our world that persists today. That hierarchy, in fact, is a decisive point when depicting the western identity; this is because it was the moment of the expansion of ‘Europe’ when the colonizing powers determined what was ‘western’ enough to become part of the pinnacle of the pyramid of ‘progress’.

The Imperialist era of Europe brought a new way of understanding the world through the development of new *discourses* that, though different for each colonial power, shared many similarities between them. Ashcroft et al (1998:37) proposed that a discourse

is the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines and values upon dominated groups. As a social formation it works to constitute reality not only for the objects it appears to represent but also for the subjects who form the community on which it depends.

Taking this into account, we could argue that human beings ‘construct’ realities, and then impose them onto other groups as the only option to explain how the world around us is and works. This is an exercise of power that, since the colonial period, became an essential part of the western mind. Following the reasoning of the development of discourses as the basis for the collective identity, Korten (via Stibbe, 2015:3) points at four stories that are in the “heart of the western imperial civilization”: the *prosperity story* -centered on the materialistic dimension of life-, the *biblical story* -centered in the afterlife, omitting the relevance of life in the physical world-, the *security story* -that promotes investing in military forces in order to protect the status quo of the relationships of power- and the *secular meaning story* -that “reduces life to matter and mechanism”. Those stories, according to the author, complement each other in order to serve a common purpose: to maintain the superiority of the western civilization and, thus, to perpetuate the European supremacy among the whole of the human world throughout history.

Up until now we have described two characteristics that compose the western identity: the connection between our languages and the imperialist practices that have been translated into colonialist dominance. Loomba (2007:8) defines colonialism as “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods”. As it happens with anything that is humanly mediated,

colonialist practices have also a linguistic dimension. When we talk about the shape that colonialism takes from a linguistic perspective, we use the notion of *linguistic imperialism*, which is described by Phillipson (1997:238) as

a theoretical construct, devised to account for linguistic hierarchization, to address issues of why some languages come to be used more and others less, what structures and ideologies facilitate such processes, and the role of language professionals.

In this sense, we use the concept of linguistic imperialism to point to those processes that, by means of power hierarchy, some languages impose over other languages. This, though not new in the age of the European empires, took on a new relevance since the colonial era. But the relevance of this factor has increased since the technological revolution of the twentieth century, as the *globalizing* process that took place in the last several decades triggered the search for a universal language to communicate in the international framework of the economic system. In this quest, some languages have managed to lead the race and, as Bernárdez (2004:113) said, though many European languages -such as Spanish or French- have long imperialistic traditions, none of those -or any other language in the world- is comparable to English when talking about the death of languages due to linguistic imperialism. As Bernárdez (2004:112) affirmed “the English language seems to feel aversion to other languages being spoken within its territories”².

Many authors have studied the phenomenon of the English language being an ‘assassin’ of a worrying number of languages. Phillipson (1993:47) defined *English linguistic imperialism* as “the dominance of English [as] asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other

² T. By A. View the appendix section.

languages”, and follows by explaining that legitimizing English linguistic imperialism served us to establish two mechanisms that are crucial to the development of the notion of western identity: *anglocentricity* and *professionalism*. For Phillipson (1993:47-48), anglocentricity is a term created by means of analogy with the notion of *ethnocentricity*, and expresses how the worldview of the English language is transported to other parts of the world by considering the English -language, culture, politics, economy...- as the highest option for progress and success; on the other hand, the author proposes the term professionalism to represent the ‘professionalization’ of the English language in terms of teaching English as a foreign language. This, the fact that the English language has been consolidated not only in the number of speakers -both native and foreign- but also in the mechanisms to keep widening it, (if possible, indefinitely), situate it as the language of prestige of the whole world, and that will have direct environmental and societal repercussions.

2. 3. 2. Capitalism and Globalization

We cannot finish this section without mentioning another crucial element that defines the western identity: *capitalism*. The expansion of the European empires and the colonial era led to the birth of a new and highly profitable international market that would set the basis for the economic system that rules our world today. Ashcroft et al (1998:40-41) claimed that

[t]he fact that European post-Renaissance colonial expansion was coterminous with the development of a modern capitalist system of economic exchange [...] meant that the perception of the colonies as primarily established to provide raw materials for the burgeoning economies of the colonial powers was greatly strengthened and institutionalized. It also meant that the relation between the colonizer and colonized was locked into a rigid hierarchy of difference deeply resistant to fair and equitable exchanges, whether economic, cultural or social.

The economic system that grew from the Industrial Revolution designed brand new discourses that complemented those that came from the colonial era. The discourse of capitalism based its logics on two main ideas, those of *progress* and *productivity*. In this sense, capitalism invites mass production, encouraging people to accumulate goods. However, over the past several decades, with the rise of ecological studies, many authors have suggested that the idea of a full liberal economic ideology is incompatible with the sustainability of the natural resources of our planet. Stibbe (2015:3) claimed that the ideology of accumulation of goods works in a discourse that treats “nature as something separate from humans, a mere stock of resources to be exploited”.

The strength of capitalism was broadened by Globalization, defined by Ashcroft et al (1998:100) as “the process whereby individual lives and local communities are affected by economic and cultural forces that operate world-wide. [...] [I]t is the process of the world becoming a single place”. The globalizing process has created a new scenario in which the privatization of natural and human resources transcends borders. In that scenario, Stibbe’s idea mentioned above takes on a new relevance: if the economic powers have access to any part of the world to exploit its resources -and thus to create more contaminating substances and materials- bearing in mind the perspective of neoliberalism, nature becomes more and more a space that provides the ruling class with the necessary resources to achieve the goal of the system -based, as we mentioned before, on the ideas of progress and productivity-.

Before moving on, it is necessary to mention that Globalization is a very complex process and thus cannot be judged in a simple manner. What is being asserted in these pages is that the globalizing process is acting in order to serve the interests of capitalism, and thus creates a discourse in which culture and languages are understood as goods of consumption that can be

exploited to make money. When that happens, the value of those elements remains subordinate to the economic power, and thus the interest on them descends. However, the interconnections among cultures are in fact a very valuable good that needs to be taken into consideration. If we take languages as examples, we can imagine the importance of being able to contact with other communities; it is being argued in these pages that professional knowledge in languages is essential to understand the world in a holistic way, and thus it will be key to solve problems in the real world. Thus, contact between cultures is essential and has many benefits to the world, but it is in those terms how it should be evaluated: globalizing the world is neither a good nor a bad thing, and it is not the purpose of this text to discuss it; on the contrary, what is relevant is to understand that, though it cannot be judged in absolute terms, Globalization can be analyzed in terms of its ecological and cultural repercussions, and that will always be an important point when studying it from an ecological perspective.

Everything that has been mentioned in this section points to a definition of several key points that design the discourse of the western civilization, that constitute the basis of its ideology -which Stibbe (2015:23) describes as a “belief [system] about how the world was, is, will be or should be which are shared by members of particular groups in society”-. In the twenty-first century world, all those characteristics are translated into ways of exercising dominance upon different groups or designing advertising discourses which orient “all aspects of a person’s endeavors for the achievement of personal satisfaction towards the consumption of commodities” (Chawla 2001, via Stibbe 2015:25), and which according to Stibbe (2015:25) is “one of the most ecologically destructive discourses”. Besides, the tendency towards supremacy that European cultures have shown throughout time has led us to believe that human nature as a whole equals western identity. Thus, we could argue that the problem that created the ecological crisis of today is in the foundation of the identity of the western

civilization. But that can be reversed if we design devices that aim for an ecological shift in our lives and, if we take into account all that has been mentioned before, language should be a central starting point.

3. GREENSPEAKING ENGLISH

After all that has been said, it is clear that the discipline of linguistics should serve -among other things- to understand how any given language affects its speakers when establishing a relationship with their environment, but it should also serve to propose alternatives that already exist in other languages to turn an environmental discourse that does not fulfill the necessities of the current ecological crisis into a truly environmentally-friendly discourse. Greenspeak is a term that, taken from Harré et al (1995), works to describe the idea of *environmental discourse* itself. However, by studying the linguistic mechanisms of other languages that do not share the worldview of English -which is, in general terms and following what has been said in the previous sections, the worldview of the western civilization- we could understand the concept of greenspeak as a *process* that can be applied to any language in order to devise a new discourse that alters our perception of nature.

This issue of the *worldview*, though complex and, to a certain extent, controversial, shows the potentiality to be in the foundation of any theoretical approach within the discipline of linguistics. The reason for that is the enormous transcendence of assuming the fact that each language in the world has the potential capacity to change -at a higher or lower level- our understanding of the world. It is necessary to mention that the level of acceptance normally depends on the formulation of the hypothesis, understanding that the relationship between language and reality can occur in different ways and at different degrees. However,

[w]ether our conception of the world is reflected in language, or whether it is language itself which enables us to frame the concepts with which we communicate remains a controversial question, but the idea that the two are interrelated has gained general acceptance among many scholars (Underhill, 2009:10-11)

As it has gained more acceptance, it would be irresponsible if linguistics would not assume it as a possibility and thus, a dimension of language that must be studied. As it has been said in previous sections, that is the motivation for this text: what if our linguistic knowledge had the ability to allow us to face the ecological crisis from a new perspective that actually works in favor of the environment?

Nevertheless, before moving on into the analysis of the different components of the English language and other languages around the globe, it is important to bear in mind two interrelated problems that concern the discipline of linguistics. The first one would be the issue of the vast *linguistic diversity* and, in relation to that, the second issue would be the problem of *linguistic classification*.

3. 1. Linguistic diversity and linguistic classification

Up until now, the field of human language studies has not reached an agreement on the number of languages that exist in the world. The fact that most of the languages that exist - and have existed in the past- have no written records makes it impossible the quantification of languages. However, although creating a numbered list of languages seems an impossible task, the truth is that the description of linguistic diversity is one of the major issues for linguistics, and that is because we cannot fully understand language if we do not have a holistic view of the object of study itself. In order to try to understand the complexity of the description of the linguistic diversity, we can follow Bernárdez (2016:33), who affirms that, throughout the history of human language, between 150.000 and 500.000 languages have existed -but not necessarily had been recorded-. That approximation does not seem very

accurate, but it is highly representative of the lack of agreement that has been mentioned before. One might think that it would be easier to quantify the languages that are currently being spoken in the world, but we would be mistaken; as Moure (2019:57) stated, depending on the source you consult, you would read that nowadays in our world we can find between 3.500 and 12.000 languages being spoken. We could argue that the reason for that disparity lies on the fact that every day new languages are discovered in unexplored lands, but the truth is that the methodology of traditional linguistics -centered on offices and teaching rooms- does not help to solve this problem (Moure, 2019:58).

By being aware of the enormous number of languages to work with, we can imagine the necessity to classify them, but we can also imagine how complex that task would be. Western linguistic traditions have tried to devise several ways to classify languages according to different principles, both internal (which means that those principles are linguistically-based) and external (those which are not linguistically-based). Taking into account the works on this issue by European linguistics in the past centuries, we can make a distinction between two main perspectives to classify languages: on the one hand, we would have *genealogical classifications* and, on the other hand, *typological classifications*.

As the name suggests, a genealogical classification of languages aims to collocate them into groups connected by family relationships. In this sort of classification, Latin would be the mother of the romance languages and, as we know, languages included in this family, descending directly from Latin's evolution, would be for example Spanish, Portuguese or Catalan. The notion of family-related languages in Europe settled during the eighteenth century, when the practices of comparative linguistics were developing a new way of studying languages. Though many of the European languages that were widely studied already showed

similitudes between them, the breaking point, has been said, comes from the works of English judge Sir William Jones, who while living and working in Calcutta realized that Sanskrit -a language that was no longer spoken in India but was used as a vehicular language for literature and scholarship, as it happened with Latin in many European countries- and some European languages seemed to have many characteristics in common (Renfrew, 1990:9). From that moment onwards, several schools of linguistics would call that the Indo-European family of languages³.

Of course, as we are not sure about how many languages have ever existed, we are not sure about how many linguistic families exist -or existed in the past-. But that is not the only reason why nowadays the genealogical criteria to classify languages does not work as it used to. Throughout its history, the genealogical classification of languages has been criticized for not being as scientifically accurate as it aimed to be. The main problem with this system is that it does not necessarily work for any given language; for example Basque is a language that is not genetically related to any other known language -it is what we call an *isolated language*-, and that is the case for many other languages. Besides, throughout history, many changes have taken place, as languages which were thought to belong to a particular family happened to belong to any other family, and even entire linguistic families disappeared from the classification as some languages were studied more deeply. This is why this is not a very helpful classification to account for linguistic diversity and to allow the scientific community to work better with its object of study. But what we can affirm about this classification is that the Indo-European family of languages is one of the most studied, and it is the one to which English belongs, in particular to the *Germanic branch* of languages.

³ Nowadays, however, the idea that it was Sir William Jones who introduced Sanskrit in western linguistics is debated, as evidence points to earlier contacts.

The other system of classification of languages that was highlighted before was the typological, and while the development of the notion of linguistic family was taking place, A. W. Schlegel and W. von Humboldt were working on what would be called the *morphological typology of languages* (Bernárdez, 2016:59). In this sort of typology, languages are classified according to their morphological features, which can be divided into two major types: *analytic* -or *isolating*- languages and *synthetic* languages. The first type shows a one-category-one-word way of structuring information, and thus word order becomes a very important requirement to identify the word category; this is the case of the English language - though in the past, as we will see later, it was not the case-; on the other hand, we call synthetic languages those which might show more than one category per word. Synthetic languages are often divided between *agglutinative* languages -those which show one category per morpheme- and *inflectional* languages -which allow more than one category and function for morpheme-.

Of course morphological typology has its problems, but it helped the experts on human language to change the perspective from which languages should be understood. As time went on, the morphological typology lost space in favor on Greenberg's *syntactic typology* (Bernárdez, 2016:72), which classified languages according to word order. Taking this criterion into consideration, English would belong to the *SVO* type of languages. This classification is also controversial nowadays, as many issues regarding the universality of this approach remain unsolved; for example, we can ask ourselves whether we can classify languages according to a syntactic criterion knowing that we are taking into consideration syntactic categories that have no universal relevance⁴.

⁴ Which, for example, happens with the notion of *Subject* (Keenan, 1976)

As we said in the previous paragraphs, genealogical classifications of languages were not accurate enough, and the several problems of typological classifications included the increase of racist thoughts among the community, as it continued on with ideas about the existence of better and worse languages. There are other classifications of languages that correspond, for example, to phonetic criteria. However, for the purpose of this project, we have covered enough information for the following instances of linguistic description of different languages. We know now that languages can be classified -with higher or lower success- according to the similitudes or differences they show between them. Now, we are going to explore some of the rules that govern the English language in relation to other languages so that we can see the repercussion of those rules in our ways of understanding the world.

3. 2. *Grammar*

According to Crystal (2008:217) *grammar* is a “central term in linguistics” that can be approached from many different perspectives. The author proposes, for example, that grammar serves to define the general description of linguistic codes or, bearing in mind a diachronic perspective, grammar is the term that was used in the pre-linguistic era to describe the studies on language. However, for the purposes of this project, grammar should be understood as the

level of structural organization which can be studied independently of phonology and semantics, and generally divided into the branches of **syntax** and **morphology**. In this sense, grammar is the study of the way words, and their component parts, combine to form sentences [Emphasis added]. (Crystal, 2008:218)

By following that definition, it will be assumed in this text that grammar refers to what we can term the *structural dimension* of language, which consists of the particular set of rules that govern a particular language. As was mentioned in the previous section, languages have very diverse ways of structuring their elements, and that has been a key element throughout the history of modern linguistics to approach the studies on human language from different perspectives.

As Crystal's quotation indicates, that structural dimension of languages -what we call grammar- is normally divided into morphology and syntax, two components that many times are studied in relation to each other under the name of *morphosyntax*. The reason for that is that they complement each other, and many times the borderlines between them are very blurred. However, definitions and descriptions for both of them can be provided in order to understand what we mean when the notion of grammar is referred to.

Starting with morphology, according to Crystal's dictionary (2008:314), it is

[t]he branch of grammar which studies the structure or forms of words, primarily through the use of the morpheme construct. It is traditionally distinguished from syntax, which deals with the rules governing the combination of words in sentences. It is generally divided into two fields: the study of inflections (**inflectional morphology**) and of word-formation (**lexical or derivational morphology**). [Emphasis added]

Morphology thus is commonly defined as the set of rules that govern the structural relations that form and create words. However, when we are talking from the perspective of general linguistics, the term *word* may be not as illustrative as we might think. The reason for that is the difficulty of finding a definition of the term *word* that suits the necessities of the morphological mechanisms of all languages; in other words, we could say that the notion of

word is not a linguistic universal in the strict sense, and the fact that we use it in the definition of morphology -as we can read in Crystal's quotation- responds to the influence of the "orthographical convention of using spaces to indicate word boundaries" (Booij, 2012:5), which, of course, does not correspond to a characteristic of *natural language* but to a convention of arbitrary relations among signs; in fact, that influence of writing on the definition of morphology comes from an Eurocentric way of understanding the study of language, which is in fact the perspective that ecolinguistics is trying to avoid. Thus, we must base our definition of morphology on what Booij (2012:8) defines as a "morpheme-based approach", in which what we study is "the syntax of morphemes", where morphemes "are defined as the minimal linguistic units with a lexical or grammatical meaning". In this perspective, what morphology will govern is the set of rules that connect the different categories (both grammatical -for instance, notions such as gender or number- and lexical or semantical) within a piece of discourse.

On the other hand, Crystal (2008:471) defines syntax as

[a] traditional term for the study of the rules governing the way words are combined to form sentences in a language. In this use, syntax is opposed to morphology, the study of word structure. An alternative definition (avoiding the concept of 'word') is the study of the interrelationships between elements of sentence structure, and of the rules governing the arrangement of sentences in sequences.

Crystal uses the notion of morphology to oppose it to syntax and, if we said that morphology dealt with the rules of word formation, syntax operates in a very similar way; the only difference lies in the fact that syntax works at sentence level. In this sense, syntax will serve as the model from which the different elements of the *transitivity structure* of the verb take their place at the sentence level. The transitivity structure of the verb makes reference to

the set of arguments that are required by a particular verb and that are dependent of it, giving us several categories among which can be highlighted (Crystal, 2008:494):

- *transitive* structures -those which demand a direct object as the verb *see*, which requires something to be seen-. One example would be the construction *I saw Jon*, composed by Subject - verb - Direct Object
- *intransitive* structures, the ones that do not require a direct object as, for example, the verb *arrive* in the construction *I arrived early* (Subject - verb - Time Adjunct)
- *ditransitive* structures: those that require both a direct and an indirect object, as it happens with the verb *give*, for which we need something to be given and someone to give it to; for example, *I gave it to you* (Subject - verb - Direct Object - Indirect Object)

In the following paragraphs of this chapter we are going to explore the morphology and the syntax of the English language; in other words, we will study the ways in which linguistic categories are combined in order to form what we call the *words* of English, and the rules that are necessary to combine those words at the sentence level. In addition to that, I am going to study the morphology and syntax of typologically and genetically different languages that use a different set of rules at the word and sentence level, so that we are able to understand how differences in language -at any level- affect our understanding of the world.

3. 2. 1. Morphosyntax of the English language

In the previous paragraphs it has been explained that both morphological and syntactic mechanisms belong to the structural level of languages, and that the sum of both components constitute the grammar of any given language. As it happens in any other languages, English can be defined in terms of morphology and syntax separately, but it is key to really understand

the grammar of English to bear in mind the idea that those two components of the language are highly interrelated and that one is affected by the other. In this section I am going to explain how the the basic morphology and syntax of English work, but also the relation that exists between them.

Recalling the distinction among the different types of languages according to morphological typology we can say that English is what we call an isolating or analytic language. Those types of languages, as it was explained before, are characterized by the lack - or a very reduced system- of inflectional morphology. This means that in the English language, in general terms, one word corresponds to one category, and thus word order will be key for the understanding of the relations among entities in the linguistic production. In this sense, the English word *want* only provides the semantic implications of the verb, but it does not concrete any further -grammatical- information such as type of word, person or number, as it would happen if we took, for example, the Spanish counterpart for that word, which would be the verb *querer*; in this particular form, the Spanish verb contains the information of person (impersonal form, infinitive) and the conjugation it belongs to (all marked by the suffix *-er*). It must be clarified that English, even though it was defined as an analytic language, does allow some inflections for its nouns and verbs. For example, we could suffix the word of our example (the verb *want*) with the particle *-ing*, which marks gerund, or with a final *-s*, which would indicate 3rd person singular. But in general terms, in Present Day English, inflectional marks are just remains from a past filled with a richer inflectional system. This means that the paradigm of a regular verb in the English language can be simplified in the following forms:

Tab. 1

Paradigm of regular verbs in English		
Present	(I, you, we, you, they) want	(He, she, it) wants
Past/Participle	(I, you, we, you, they) wanted	(He, she, it) wanted

Those instances of inflectional marks for the verbs in English, as explained above, are remains of the past system of inflectional morphology of the English language, but if we wanted to indicate other forms or tenses, we would need to add separate particles; for example, to indicate the infinitive we would use the particle *to* before the verb, and the formation of the future tense in English requires the use of auxiliary particles such as *will* or even complete constructions (*be going to*). If we compare the formation of future in English with its counterpart in an inflectional language such as Spanish, we can see how those different mechanisms produce similar meanings:

(1) I will eat

Subject (1st person singular) - plural marker - main verb

(2) Com-e-ré-Ø

root of the main verb - thematic vowel - time+aspect+mood - 1st person singular

On the other hand, English nouns also allow some instances of inflection, but only for the category of number. Present Day English shows two categories of number, singular and plural, marked in regular nouns with the suffix *-(e)s*. Thus, the plural of *dog* would be *dogs* and the plural of *inch* would be *inches*. There are also remains of other plural markers in English that come from the past inflectional system of Old English as, for example, is the case of the following pairs:

(3) *Mouse - mice*

(4) *Tooth - teeth*

(5) *Man - men*

All these examples taken from Burridge and Bergs (2017:83) show instances of *i-mutated plurals*, which according to these scholars are “remains of an earlier pronunciation rule [...] whereby the stem vowel of the word harmonized with the vowel of the i-plural ending”. To understand this process, we can take a look on the evolution of example (3):

Tab. 2. Adapted from Burridge and Bergs (2017:83)

PERIOD	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Proto-Germanic	* <i>mūs-</i>	* <i>mūsiz</i>
Old English	<i>mūs</i>	<i>mȳs</i>
Middle English	<i>mus</i>	<i>mis</i>
Modern English	<i>mouse</i>	<i>mice</i>

However, as it has been said, those are only remains of the past of the language, but the mechanism of i-mutation is no longer productive in the English language, so new plural forms cannot be created by this mechanism.

From a diachronic perspective, as it has been introduced in the example of plurals, Old English was a completely different language attending to morphological criteria; it would have been classified as an inflectional language, as it showed a richer and more complete system of inflections for both nouns and verbs. On the one hand, the inflectional marks that NPs showed in the English language responded to the categories of *case* (Old English distinguished four cases, *nominative*, *accusative*, *genitive* and *dative*)⁵, *gender* (with inflections for *masculine*, *feminine* and *neuter*)⁶ and *number* (which, although it also only had singular and plural, had different morphemes depending on the declension of a particular

⁵ Case in Present Day English is reflected in the *Saxon genitive* (Gramley, 2012)

⁶ Examples of gender in Present Day English can be found in the system of pronouns.

noun). On the other hand, Old English verbs also showed inflectional morphology, and were marked with different inflections for time and person.

The fact that a shift from a synthetic towards an analytic language took place serves as an example of how those classifications, though illustrative, do not represent exact *types*, but a continuum in which a particular language can move through historical evolution. Moreover, those categories cannot be understood as strictly as we might like because of the complexity of language change. Changes at one level of language affect the other component. The history of morphological change of the English language is a very good example of that, as the changes in the sound system (the weakening of unstressed vowels into /ə/) affected the system of inflections because they tend to appear in unstressed syllables, and unstressed vowels have the tendency to disappear. The morphological changes also affected the syntax of the English language, as it will be explained in the following paragraphs.

The syntax of the English language, as explained above, corresponds to the typological classification of SVO, which means that *unmarked* -or canonical- constructions in English will follow that order of verbal arguments, and it shows a highly strict word order. As happens with morphological typology, that classification does not represent fully-closed categories, but a way of categorizing the canonical structure of the language. As it has been said several times now, both syntax and morphology work together in structuring the language, and the repercussions of that interconnection among language components in English is very obvious if we take into account a diachronic point of view as, according to Givón (2001:23),

[w]hile synchronic grammatical structure and its typological diversity can and should be studied on its own terms, a profound understanding of the principles that govern typological variation in grammar cannot be arrived at without studying the diachronic process of grammaticalization.

While we classified Present Day English as a clear SVO language, the word order of Old English is not as easy to classify. According to Denison (2014:28) it is not clear whether we should classify Old English as showing a SVO or a SOV word order “since clauses of both types were common”. However, we can argue that word order in English has changed throughout time, and Denison (2014:28-30) proposes that Old English “was a mixed V-2/V-F language”⁷ -and thus had a more free word structure than modern English-, while Present Day English “is consistently V-3 or SVO”⁸. But what is most interesting about this is the reasons why this happened, and to what extent changes at other levels of language triggered this process. It is important to mention that changes at the level of grammar are less common than, for example, changes in the lexicon (this will be explained later on) and, as Burridge and Bergs (2017:141) explained, those grammatical changes happen gradually and take time. An example -proposed by these scholars- of how these types of changes happen gradually comes from the fact that other Germanic languages such as Dutch still show some examples of V-F constructions coming from Proto-Germanic. By understanding the particular history of the English language -marked by an incredible amount of change at all levels-, one can understand one of the main reasons why the English syntactic structure changed: the previously mentioned loss of inflectional marks. According to Acuña-Fariña (2009:408) English turned into a frozen word order the moment it lost its inflections. It is a very common characteristic of isolating languages, as the lack of markers of grammatical categories requires some way to indicate the syntactic role of a particular argument.

⁷ According to Denison (2014:28-29), V-2 languages are those “in which [...] one sentence constituent precedes the verb”, while V-F consists on positioning the verb in final position.

⁸ Denison (2014:28) explains that V-3 corresponds to those constructions in which the finite verb comes after the Subject, “whether or not there is any pre-subject element”.

This has been a very brief introduction to the English grammar according to the criteria of classification of languages that were mentioned above. The next step is to explain several examples of the grammar of different (typologically and genetically speaking) languages that bear within them different implications regarding the ways of understanding the world that surrounds their speakers.

3. 2. 2. Äiwoo and noun classes

According to Ethnologue, Äiwoo is a language spoken in the Solomon Islands by over 8.400 speakers. It belongs to the group of *Temotu languages* (Ross and Næss, 2007), native to the South Pacific Ocean, and it is very different from the English language in every possible way we can imagine. It has been argued to be a very representative example of the *Oceanic languages* because some of its morphosyntactic characteristics (Ross and Næss, 2007), “including OVA word order in transitive clauses, a distinction between prefixed subject markers on intransitive verbs and suffixed subject markers on transitive verbs, and a verb phrase structure that appears to be ergative in that it includes the V and the A, but not O or S” (Næss, 2013).

In this section we will focus on the system of noun classes of this language, which consists of “about 40 noun classes, comparable to gender” (Harré et al, 1995:32). According to Næss (2006:269), in that system of classification of nouns we do find categories for a gender that make reference to the extralinguistic sexual dimension of human beings, as in table 3⁹.

⁹ Note that for the prefix *me-* some scholars (Næss, 2006:276) have argued that that category would be translated as *person*, but it is also commonly used to denote the lack of person when it accompanies the negative verb *bââ*, what could be translated into the English term *anyone*.

Tab. 3: gender in Äiwoo (created using the data in Næss, 2006:276,287)

<i>gi-</i>	Masculine form	<i>Giva</i> (baby boy)
<i>si-</i>	Feminine form	<i>Siva</i> (baby girl)
<i>me-</i>	Human collective	<i>Bââ me-ki-pa</i> (“lit. There is not anyone who steals”)
<i>mi-</i>	Neutral	

Those examples of gender¹⁰ help us to introduce the system of prefixation in the Äiwoo language, and how the categorization of its nouns work. There are many other instances of noun classes that would be very unfamiliar to any speaker of English, such as the prefix *pe-*, which is used to mark collectivity -as in *pe-Tuwo=ke* (“the people of Tuwo”, which is the name of a village)- (but not to refer to plurality in the terms of grammatical number, as it can be used as in *inâ peTuwo* (which translates into “he is from Tuwo”) (Næss 2006:280). This example shows that the way of approaching collectivity differs incredibly from the perspective of a language such as English, which only considers that notion in the category of plural and in the system of pronouns. But, for the purpose of this project, I will focus now on the types of nouns of Äiwoo that Harré et al (1995) have considered the most environmentally-oriented.

First of all, Harré et al (1995:32) signal the prefix *si-* to denote “objects and items that are despised, unclean, not valuable, dangerous or unpleasant”¹¹. Besides, the authors suggest that there are other prefixes that would have enormous environmental implications such as, for

¹⁰ The notion of *gender* in linguistics corresponds to a system of classification of nouns into different categories. However, sometimes gender is used to indicate only a classification that corresponds to what we call *natural gender*, which references the extralinguistic reality in terms of sex. Thus, I will use always the notion of *noun classes* which, being very similar to gender, it “is often employed when the class system [...] does not have a basis in natural gender” (Næss, 2006:288).

¹¹ The sociolinguistic implications of the fact that the prefix *si-* denotes both despised objects and female humans are enormous, and would constitute a very interesting point for further studies.

example, *nu-*, which marks nouns “that are dependent on something else for their existence” (Harré et al, 1995:33); *ka-*, that serves to signal “entities that are [...] inert but are liable to sudden dramatic changes of behavior or appearance” (Harré et al, 1995:33); and *nyo-*, which refers to “items moving or stretching away into the distance” (Harré et al, 1995:33). These authors have asserted that the presence of those noun classes in any language would have a direct impact on the way the speakers approach objects and entities -specially those related to environmental issues-. That happens because they consider that those types of noun classes help to adapt the linguistic production to the necessities of what the authors call *systematic adequacy*, “a notion that is closely linked with the ease of decoding” (Harré et al, 1995:31). In other words, that system of classification of nouns helps the speakers to have an easier way to decode discourse, as it avoids ambiguities. This idea is based on the fact that many European languages show a high degree of morphological and semantical *unmarkedness*, and thus their “speakers [...] discuss phenomena at a greater level of generality and in value-free terms” (Harré et al, 1995:33).

If we take that perspective into consideration, we could argue that the English morphological features are not very explicative, as speakers are not necessarily able to distinguish between static or mutable entities, or whether something is good or bad for them or their environment. Of course, those value scales can be subjective, but many times, environmentally-related discourses have taken the ambiguity of those categories in their favor. Thus, speakers of English have no clue whether *insecticides* are elements that only affect insects or if, on the contrary, they alter the whole ecosystem they are operating in -as, in fact, happens- (Harré et al, 1995:21). If the use of Äiwoo’s prefix *ka-* was compulsory, the speakers of English would be able to understand if the term *disposal* refers to a permanent or a temporary solution, and they would be able to act in light of that knowledge.

What noun classes have to contribute to facing ecological problems is the capacity they have to classify or categorize the elements that surround us. Of course, we could create structures as ‘cigarettes are bad for your health and the health of the people that are next to you’. Languages have that ability to incorporate as much information as the speaker wants. However, if we used the system of noun classes of Äiwoo, cigarettes or “*si-garettes* would not even need a government health warning [emphasis added]” (Harré et al, 1995:33). The difference between ‘cigarettes are bad for your health and the health of the people that are next to you’ and *si-garettes* are obvious and, though we have the resources to indicate that smoking is bad for your health in English, if marking names were a compulsory element of the language, speakers would be way more aware of the implications of anything they would mention.

3. 2. 3. Evidentials in Tuyuca

As we have seen in the previous section, languages differ in the amount of morphological markers and categories, and that has a direct repercussion in the way speakers approach the entities regarding a deeper understanding of them. One of those grammatical devices that have a direct impact in the amount of information provided by the speaker is what in linguistics has been called *evidentials*, which, according to Crystal (2008:176) serve to “express a speaker’s strength of commitment to a proposition in terms of the available evidence”. Although not all languages show this characteristic, it is not a very unusual mechanism among languages, and it is present in many languages throughout the world, with different degrees of ‘evidence’.

One of the most canonical examples of the use of evidentials is the Tuyuca language, mainly spoken in some regions of Brazil and Colombia. Regarding the number of speakers, the Ethnologue recognizes 640 in Colombia, but expands the number of speakers to almost 1.500 counting the population from other countries. In Tuyuca, the evidentiality is always required by the verb, and it shows five evidential categories which, according to Barnes (1984:257), are “(1) visual, (2) nonvisual (to indicate any of the senses other than visual), (3) apparent, (4) secondhand, and (5) assumed”. These markers force the speakers of this language to indicate the degree of certainty they have about anything they talk about, showing a different degree of commitment to the propositions they state than that of English speakers.

Of course English speakers have strategies to provide that kind of information, and markers and expressions such as *I guess* or *maybe* have the implied meaning of Tuyuca’s evidential categories. However, although “[e]very language [including English] has some way of making reference to the source of information [...] not every language has grammatical evidentiality” (Aikhenvald, 2003:1). This means that, first, that information in languages such as English is optional -and thus subjected to the speaker’s interests-, and, second, that as *grammatical categories*, they do not alter the semantic meaning of a proposition, but provide with further grammatical information that categorizes the level of reliability of that proposition. To illustrate these differences that exist between the semantic and the grammatical meaning of a proposition, it would be interesting to take a look on the following set of examples taken from Barnes (1984:257):

Tab. 4. Adapted from Barnes (1984:257)

Evidential category	Example	Translation	Grammatical implications
Visual (1)	<i>diiga apé-wi</i>	‘He played soccer’	I saw him play
Nonvisual (2)	<i>diiga apé-ti</i>	‘He played soccer’	I heard the game and him, but I didn’t see it or him
Apparent (3)	<i>diiga apé-yi</i>	‘He played soccer’	I have seen evidence that he played (for example, his distinctive shoe print on the playing field), but I did not see him play
Secondhand (4)	<i>diiga apé-yigi</i>	‘He played soccer’	I obtained the information from someone else
Assumed (5)	<i>diiga apé-hīyi</i>	‘He played soccer’	It is reasonable to assume that he did

These examples show the differences between adding elements that provide with a particular semantic meaning (such as the examples of English given before) and the grammatical implications of inflectional markers. In the case of Tuyuca’s evidentials, that information is not provided by choice, but by basic inflection of the verb, and thus cannot be avoided by speakers.

The implications of evidentials in the environmental discourse are very interesting. The reason for that is that, by the use of evidentials, speakers are forced to imply the level of reliability of any given statement, which has a direct repercussion on the degree of commitment that a particular speaker shows towards a particular proposition and thus, it also affects the way listeners would take that particular statement as true or, at least, somewhat reliable. Thus, the interesting point of the Tuyuca example regarding environmental issues is not the particular evidential categories that this particular language shows but the hierarchy among them.

According to Barnes (1984:263) the use of evidentials is open to choice in the sense that speakers may have and share some knowledge that they might have perceived with any sense other than vision -in which case, it would correspond a nonvisual evidential marker-, but that might have also been explained to the speaker by someone else who did witness the facts visually -and thus it would correspond the use of a secondhand evidential-; in that case, the speaker must choose between those two perspectives and, as Barnes (1984:263) pointed at, speakers of Tuyuca prefer their “own nonvisual report to a secondhand report, even if the secondhand report is given by someone who saw the state or event”. This indicates us that vision appears to be the most trusted way of getting to know anything but only when that visual information is firsthand. If not, speakers of Tuyuca would trust more any other senses than a secondhand information, and thus, what is valued is the degree of certainty of the speaker himself, as the speaker has to be the most reliable source for the statement he makes. In consequence, “there is a hierarchy of preferred evidentials, the preferred ones being visual, followed by nonvisual, apparent, secondhand, and, last, assumed” (Barnes 1984:268).

In a language such as Tuyuca, speakers need to commit to the statements that they produce, and the information of the source can never be omitted because grammar forces them to include that information -if not, it would be grammatically (and not semantically) incomplete-. That makes it more complicated to be ambiguous or even to lie about certain things, as it is the speakers who are the only ones responsible for their own statements. This connects with Stibbe’s (2015:28) analysis of destructive -regarding the environment- discourses; this scholar proposes that damaging discourses can only be fought against through what he calls *resistance*, that “consists of raising awareness that the ideology conveyed by the discourse is just a story, and that the story has harmful effects”. For example, Donald Trump’s tweets regarding environmental issues are well known by most of us; he has been tweeting

about climate change since pre-presidential times, and those tweets are nowadays studied from many perspectives. I want to use the following example to show how important it would be for the reliability of this tweet if English used evidentials:

“The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive.” (@realDonaldTrump)

In this tweet (which was published in 2012 but still shows interactions in the social network) affirms that global warming is not a thing. If the current president of the United States of America -one of the leading countries of the world, and also the most responsible country for the increase of the global temperature (Matthews et al, 2014:3)- were forced to indicate his source of information, the repercussion of that statement would be a bit different; that would not necessarily be because of the commitment of Trump towards his statement but because of the receivers of that message. If English speakers (and, most concretely, the American voters) were used to a system of evidentials that created a hierarchy of reliability of the sources of the speaker, people might take less seriously statements that deny global warming -as Trump, if we take literally the system of evidentials of Tuyuca, would have never been able to make such a statement using the visual category-.

3. 2. 4. Arrernte and kinship

Mparntwe Arrernte is a language spoken in Aranda -Australia- (Wilkins, 1989:1); according to Ethnologue, it had 1.910 speakers in 2016. It belongs to the group of Arandic languages, a subgroup of the Pama-Nyungan family of languages (Wilkins, 1989:6). One of the most salient characteristics of this family of languages is that a dramatic sound change led to a

change in vocabulary that differentiated them from other Australian Aboriginal languages. Of course, those changes affected grammar and, for example, verbs lost their conjugations (Wilkins, 1989:6). However, in these paragraphs I will develop another salient -and very famous- characteristic of this language: kinship terms and their marking.

Harré et al (1995:156) discussed that some grammatical characteristics of this Australian language “reinforce the aboriginal belief in the unity between nonpersons and persons, the interdependency between country, kin and totemic beings”. This is done through the development of kinship terms that are grammatically marked. Arrernte classifies human relationships into 8 subsections which “are: Peltharre, Kemarre, Mpetyane, Pengarte, Kngwarreye, Angale (or Ngale), Perrwerle and Penangke” (Wilkins, 1989:34). Besides this subsections, Arrernte is also famous for its kin terms, which are marked morphologically by elements such as especial markers for possession. According to Wilkins (1989:133) “[t]here are two ways of marking kin possession, as opposed to any other type of possession” which are made through possessor suffixes and a dative form for possessor. The following table shows those specific possessor suffixes -only in singular form- for kin terms:

Tab. 5. Adapted from Wilkins (1989:133)

Suffix	Grammatical meaning	Implied semantic meaning
-atye	1 kin POSS	‘my relation’
-angkwe	2 kin POSS	‘your relation’
-ikwe	3 kin POSS	‘his/her/its relation’

By using those suffixes, a Mparntwe Arrernte speaker could take the word for ‘sister’ and form *yay-atye*, which means ‘my sister’ (Wilkins, 1989:34).

The fact that speakers use different markers for kin relations than for any other form of possession is interesting enough; speakers of English would use the same markers to express possession of objects and possession of humans (there is no difference between saying *my brother* and *my pencil*, as if the possession of humans was comparable at any level with the possession of writing instruments). But if those differences in the possessive markers already suggest a different worldview regarding human relationships, Harré et al (1995:156) signaled that in this language, some of the “pronominal kin possessive suffixes attach to both kin terms and the two terms: *altyerrre* (dreaming country, dreaming totem) and *pmere* (land which one is responsible for and bound to by Dreamtime law)”. In this sense, Arrernte speakers understand that the environment can be part of their kin; that shows instances of collaborative visions of nature, in which humans understand the earth not as a consumption good but as a part of their ecosystem, as a source of life -for humans within their ecosystem and not as external parts of it-.

3. 3. *Lexicon*

The previous section explored the repercussion of grammatical mechanisms in our ways of perceiving and portraying reality. The examples previously provided suggested that some morphosyntactic characteristics of several languages -in comparison to their counterparts in English- have a direct impact in our relationship with the environment. However, we cannot finish this project without mentioning another component of languages that also has a direct impact in our way of approaching environmental issues: the lexicon; it is, according to Crystal (2008:278), “[i]n its most general sense, [...] synonymous with vocabulary”; in this sense, when we mention lexicon, we will be referring to the inventory of words of a particular

language. So, what it is going to be dealt with in this section is the particular words (lexicon) and their meaning implications (their semantics) of particular languages.

We focused before on grammar because it represents the basic structure of any given language, and thus remains fixed in that particular language for a long period of time. However, as many scholars (Harré et al, 1995; Stibbe, 2015; Burridge and Bergs, 2017) have suggested, lexicon is a very interesting feature of language when we want to talk about changes in the world of the speakers; in the words of Sapir in Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001:14):

[i]t is the vocabulary of a language that most clearly reflects the physical and social environment of its speakers. The complete vocabulary of a language may indeed be looked upon as a complex inventory of all the ideas, interests, and occupations that take up the attention of the community.¹²

In this sense, the repertoire of words of a language -specially of those that are spoken in areas of rapid technological development such as English- is in constant flux. Some words are created or borrowed, some words are lost, and that can happen due to internal processes of languages -such as *compounding* or *derivation*- or thanks to language contact and changes in the world of the speakers (Burridge and Bergs, 2017:28-46). That is why the lexicon of a particular language can be also studied in terms of its ecological adequacy, as it will be developed in the following paragraphs.

¹² This is the most traditional view on the worldview studies, but it must not be taken dogmatically; though average speakers might be more lexicon-aware than grammar-aware, both elements have direct repercussions on our way of perceiving the world, as it is being discussed in this project.

3. 3. 1. Lexicon of the English Language

Of course, making a descriptive analysis of the lexicon of English (or any other language) is not as ‘easy’ as a study on grammar could be. The reason for that is that lexicon and semantics are the less systematic components of language -if we compare them with grammar or phonetics- and thus their study must follow different paths (Burridge and Bergs, 2017:28-69). However, the history of the English lexicon is very interesting due to the traces of linguistic contact, so this exploration of the English lexicon will begin with the words of Old English.

Old English had a vocabulary inherited almost entirely from Germanic or formed by compounding or derivation from Germanic elements. There were Latin loan words, mainly to do with philosophy, religion and medicine, and some compounds *calqued* on Latin forms. (Denison, 2014:10)

As Denison explains in this quotation, Old English lexicon showed what would have been expected in a Germanic language. However, it was already in this period when English started to actively borrow words from other languages, particularly Celtic words -everyday words and place names- and, in greater numbers, Latin loans, which included “new names to many local objects and experiences, and introduced several fresh concepts” (Crystal, 2019:8). But borrowing did not end there; according to Crystal (2019:24), “[t]he history of English vocabulary is one of repeated invasions” and, before the Middle English times, two additional sources of borrowing must be highlighted: a second wave of Latin loanwords -coming from the Christianization process of the British isles- and a considerable amount of borrowing from Old Norse after the Scandinavian invasions (Crystal, 2019:24-25).

We could argue that one of the most important moments of vocabulary expansion of the English language derived from the Norman conquest in the Middle English period. In fact, as mentioned in section 2.3. of this text, many times it has been argued that, due to French influence, English suffered from a process of creolization. It was also mentioned that not every scholar agreed on this perspective, and that Gramley (2012:90) rejected that idea and proposed that what happened after the Norman conquest in the English language was a process of *relexification*. Whether or not current English is the subsequent language of a process of creolization, the truth is that this relexification that Gramley mentioned seems to be true; according to Crystal (2019:46) several thousands of words were introduced from French into English during that period. However, the English lexicon had only started to grow at that time; “[i]t has been estimated that the period between 1530 and the Restoration (1660) displayed the fastest lexical growth in the history of the language” (Crystal, 2019:76). The elaboration of dictionaries and the contact of English with non-European languages (this is the moment of the Imperialistic Europe) kept widening the English vocabulary up until modern days.

The lexicon of current English, as it has been traditionally said, is one of the largest among all existing languages in the world. Counting that number of words -taking into account all that has been said until this moment in this text about linguistic diversity- is probably impossible, but what can be asserted is that the English language nowadays boasts an impressive number of words. But deciding what is a word (as it was explained in section 3.1.) is not that easy; to solve this problem -in order to make an estimation of the number of words that exist in the language-, we can compare several dictionaries of English; according to Crystal (2019:129) the biggest dictionaries of English “include over half a million lexemes”; an example of these large dictionaries of English would be the *Oxford English*

Dictionary, which in 2018 showed over 600.000 entries (Crystal, 2019:129). After the brief history of the English vocabulary that has been made in this section, we can imagine that this wide lexicon of English is the result of an amalgamation of the original Germanic vocabulary with borrowings of a considerable number of languages.

3. 3. 2. What English has, what English lacks: environmental vocabulary

Harré et al (1995) propose that it is in lexicon where more rapid changes could be introduced in order to make general population more ecologically-aware through language. Because of that, these scholars argued that environmental terms in English might suffer from *semantic vagueness* -as, for example, with terms such as *progress* or *primitive*-, *semantic underdifferentiation* -as it happens with terms like *growth*, that might refer to several different phenomena (such as natural growth or dangerous growth of diseases)- and *misleading encoding* -as it happens with the term *fertilizers*, “which can render soil infertile”- (Harré et al, 1995:29). If we say that vocabulary has a very obvious and direct impact in the way speakers of a particular language conceptualize the world, and if the analysis of English environmental vocabulary shows that it is ambiguous and misleading, what shape would a truly green discourse have?

The above mentioned scholars are not the only ones that proposed that the terms that English shows to talk about environmental issues are not as clear as the environment might need. According to Schultz in Fill and Muhlhausler (2001:109) “[p]eople who promote the protection of the natural environment also use the language of exploitation”, which is supposed, in western societies, to portray an earth that can be sold and thus treated as a commercial product. In this sense, she distinguishes some terms that, though neutral, show

connotations that favor exploitations -for example, the word *develop* is normally connected with positive ideas of expansion and economic growth, but to be considered environmentally friendly requires the modifier *sustainable*- (Schultz in Fill and Muhlhausler 2001:110); the author also argued that “the language of the resource development industries is replete with euphemisms that portray their activities as benign, or even actually beneficial to the natural environment” -as it would happen with the word *clearing* which is used in environmental contexts, refers to the removal of native vegetation of a piece of land- (Schultz in Fill and Muhlhausler 2001:111). In this sense, this author proposed that we should revise this use of words in order to be more accurate and thus more aware of our ecological responsibility; she proposed examples of alternatives for those terms that she considers ambiguous in the English language; some of those examples can be read in the following table:

Tab. 6. Examples taken from Schultz in Fill and Muhlhausler (2001:113-114)

Conventional words and expressions of the English language	Proposed alternatives
Controlled burning	Authorized burning
Degenerate tree	Old or ancient tree
Greenhouse effect	(Human-induced) climatic dislocation
Sterilized land	Land protected from destructive exploitation

These examples make very clear what is the worldview of English regarding environmental issues: land belongs to landlords and thus it is a product for exploitation. In this sense, the last example (*sterilized land/land protected from destructive exploitation*) shows us how sometimes the terms that are used to designate elements that are good for the environment are generally associated to stigmatized ideas in our society. In her reasoning, Schultz in Fill and Muhlhausler (2001:109-121) proposes that the view of the environment of English speakers is thus fully affected by the neoliberal values that were explained in section 2.3. But could we have other words that would be less ambiguous in ecological terms?

3. 3. 3. Greenlandic, Cherokee and Enga

Some examples of lexicon that are less ambiguous in environmental terms can be found in different languages; for example, Greenlandic -which, according to Ethnologue is a language spoken by over 50.000 people in Greenland-, uses the same words to denote male and female members (according to their reproductive characteristics) of all species, including humans; in this language, you would use the term *angut* to refer to any male individual of any species, but it is also translated into *man*, while the term for *woman*, *arnaq*, also serves to denote any other female animal; in this example, we see a continuity between humans and the animal kingdom (Bernárdez, 2016:114); there is not a differentiation because both are considered to belong to the same category.

Another example proposed by Chawla in Fill and Muhlhausler (2001:118) explains that “Cherokee Indians extend kinship terms to all of the natural world”¹³. Thus, the new moon is named *grandfather*, and water is addressed as a human entity (Chawla in Fill and Muhlhausler 2001:118). The author claims that this has been traditionally seen with a patronizing attitude by members of technologized communities, but Chawla has made clear that this community establishes a healthier relationship with their environment because this linguistic issue; if a river is considered a family member (as it is essential for their life in earth in the same way that their human family members), contaminating it would be considered an offense; thus, this community has “traditionally treated the inanimate and animate world with awe and concerns in ways that do not indiscriminately damage the natural environment” and argues that this perspective of nature is “compatible with Heisenberg’s plea that we start

¹³ This example reminds to that of the one in 3.1.

perceiving the cosmos holistically rather in a fragmented fashion that places human beings in the dominant position” (Chawla in Fill and Muhlhausler 2001:118).

Lastly, we can take the example of Enga, a language native of Papua New Guinea. Harré et al (1995:141) stated that this language shows a very considerable number of terms that name vegetable species, particularly trees and plants¹⁴. These scholars said that the “most prominent among the Enga names for plants [...] are those that [they have] identified as being of use as foods, medicines, building materials and so forth” (Harré et al, 1995:141-142). In this sense, what Enga language shows is not a more ‘primitive’ way of understanding the world; instead, it could be argued that Enga people are not only more familiar with natural elements, but also with what those natural elements can do for them. In western medicine plants are also used; however, as when drugs reach the average consumer they are covered in plastic and showing shapes and flavors that remind us more to their industrial production than to the natural world that provided the materials to produce them, we tend to denaturalize them and thus we do not understand that vegetation that surrounds us is as valuable as to be the active principle of the drugs that kill our diseases.

These examples evidence the relevance lexicon has among the worldview of particular languages. As it was stated before, lexicon is highly related to the speakers’ conceptual world and thus it might seem easier to draw some conclusions by analyzing it. That property of lexicon also makes it easier to make linguistic politics in order to ‘greenspeak’ our languages, and that can be done through something that has been explained earlier in this chapter: borrowing. As it has been previously mentioned, a language such as English has benefitted

¹⁴ We must be careful with the temptation of understanding that a higher number of names to denote plants corresponds with a primitive society; as it will be explained in the following lines, a greater amount of names of plants can be less related to pre-modernized societies and more with different ways of approaching societal and technological advancements.

from contact and borrowing before the present day; as Mühlhäusler in Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001:34) proposed, borrowing is a very interesting way of widening the lexicon of any given language, and it helps to shape the environmental discourse into a more concrete -and thus effective- one. But other mechanisms may take over the vocabulary necessities of English; the very nature of words let them open to change and, to finish this section, it would be interesting to pay attention to Schultz's (in Fill and Muhlhausler, 2001:109) words, which reminds us the open window that lexicon is:

words are not like coins or medals, with a fixed value, appearance, size and shape, unchanging and unchangeable. Words are more like kaleidoscopes, shifting in shape and colour as they are tilted and turned, whether deliberately or not.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this project was to prove that, as languages are tools that develop different realities that affect the way speakers understand the world, we could find some elements at different levels of languages that could give us clues of diverse perspectives from which we could face the ecological crisis of the twenty-first century world. To do so, the proposal was (following a theoretical approach taken from the works of modern general linguistics) to compare some characteristics of the English language to examples of endangered languages that could affect directly our way of understanding how we should treat the environment.

In the first chapter, a general context and the theoretical framework were developed; this was based on the rich growth of linguistics in the twentieth century, which witnessed the birth of branches of linguistics such as ecolinguistics, that framed human language studies in a different place from which it could approach its object of study from new perspectives that suited the necessities of the modern world; besides that, thanks to that progress and increased amount of studies on human language, what has been known since the last century as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis settled as a philosophical school that proposed that languages modified realities, and it was taken as the foundation of the theoretical approach of this project. Lastly, the context of the current world was explained, and in particular the basis of the western identity, which was represented globally by the English language, vehicular language of the twenty-first century world.

After that, the project entered into linguistic analysis and comparison. First, we contextualized the necessity of studying languages from a more general perspective rather a merely descriptive way, in which a more profound understanding of the English language

could only be reached by comparing its linguistic features to those of several distant languages. Then, dividing the text into a section of grammar and a section of lexicon, the characteristics of the English language served to present different examples of linguistic mechanisms of other languages that were evidence of the way in which language portrays realities differently, and those different ways of shaping the world were contextualized from an environmentally-friendly perspective. We called it ‘greenspeaking English’, taking the concept developed by Harré et al (1995) and using it to propose a way to make English speakers more environmentally-aware.

Before moving on, it is important to mention that what has been discussed about ‘greenspeaking the English language’ should not be misinterpreted as a proposal to *change* the language. In fact, the incorporation of characteristics of other languages into our own is an essential part of linguistic change. As Haugen in Fill and Muhlhausler (2001:63-64) says,

“[f]or English [...] [we can recognize] the existence of at least two structural layers, the Germanic and the non-Germanic, mostly Mediterranean (French, Latin, Greek, Italian). Historically this means that at certain periods in the life of each language, influential men have learned certain languages and have enriched [...] their languages by modeling their expression on that of certain teacher languages”.

But the purpose of this project was not to imply that there are languages that are better as they have more ‘complete’ morphological systems or wider amounts of vocabulary to refer to natural phenomena. On the contrary, the aim of this project was to illustrate how linguistic knowledge is a powerful tool to develop a greater theoretical framework that allows language professionals to cooperate with experts in different fields to fight for a common cause. That common cause, in this particular case, is facing the environmental crisis of the twenty-first

century, and throughout these pages it has been proved that linguistic knowledge can be enlighten us to change the system that is destroying our planet.

The examples of both English and some endangered languages proved that the hypothesis of linguistic relativity -and its applications to environmental issues- worked to explain different perspectives to approaching ecological issues and to treating the environment. The aim was not to imply that the English language was not good enough to be the vehicle to devise an environmental discourse, but to point at the fact that the production of linguistic professional knowledge and linguistic awareness among the general population could constitute key issues to design a more sustainable society that can continue life in a planet as similar as possible to how we know it today.

Unluckily, many interesting points had to be left out of the project, due to the limits of a piece of work such as this. However, it would be interesting to look more deeply into some aspects of this text in future studies. For example, in order to reach a deeper understanding of the implications of an environmental discourse in the English language, it would be very interesting to make a diachronic study of its grammar and lexicon to study how linguistic changes paralleled the history of its speakers according to environmental issues. Besides, further studies could follow a more general perspective in which the syntactic features of several languages are compared in depth so that we could cast some light on the relevance of syntax in our way of portraying the world.

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6. APPENDIX

TRANSLATED QUOTATIONS

1. “[T]oda lengua manifiesta un análisis del mundo exterior que le es específico, que impone al hablante una manera de ver y de interpretar este mundo”. Mounin (1972:96-97)
4. “[E]l inglés parece tener aversión a que se hablen otras lenguas en su territorio”. Bernárdez (2004:112)

